



UNITED STATES MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

799 United Nations Plaza
New York, N.Y. 10017

Tel. 212-415-4050
FAX 212-415-4053

PRESS RELEASE

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Statement by Kenneth Hodgkins, United States Adviser to the 47th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, in the Special Political Committee, on Item #72, International Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, October 28, 1992

Mr. Chairman, the Forty-seventh session of the General Assembly is meeting at a time during which dramatic changes continue to take place in the world political scene. There is no doubt that these changes present real possibilities to broaden international cooperation. The challenge before us is to seek those opportunities which will strengthen the role of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) as the chief advocate in the United Nations system for international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space. Bearing this in mind, at future sessions of COPUOS and its subcommittees, we must redouble our efforts to deepen the scientific and technical content of our deliberations, avoiding the infusion of issues, such as disarmament, which are more appropriately handled in other fora.

As Ambassador Hohenfellner correctly noted in his opening statement, the past year has been a productive one for the Committee. This is no more evident than in our work celebrating the International Space Year (ISY).

Mr. Chairman, the International Space Year is an historic worldwide effort dedicated to the spirit of discovery, exploration, and cooperation among the world's space scientists, engineers, administrators, and policymakers.

The concept of ISY originated with the late Senator Spark Matsunaga of Hawaii, to commemorate the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' voyage to the Americas and the 35th anniversary of the International Geophysical Year, while calling attention to the importance of space activities. ISY was incorporated into a joint resolution of Congress and endorsed by Presidents Bush and Reagan. ISY activities are being carried out in both the public and private sector.

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In addition to the work done through the UN Programme on Space Applications, concrete results were realized through the Space Agency Forum on International Space Year (SAFISY). SAFISY has grown to a membership of 29 space agencies and ministries from around the world and 10 affiliated members representing organizations with space interests. SAFISY has served as a forum to coordinate ISY activities in the field of earth science and technology, space science, and education and training. The projects include analysis of scientific data, conferences to report on scientific results, educational programs to inspire young people to pursue careers in math and science, and public outreach to stimulate interest in space.

In our view, the UN's involvement in the International Space Year is another sign that the process initiated several years ago of reinvigorating the work of COPUOS is on the right track. COPUOS members have long agreed that strengthening international cooperation in the exploration of outer space implies the need for the Committee and its Subcommittees to improve wherever necessary the methods and forms of their work. We have yet to see the sort of substantial changes that we believe are required to put COPUOS and its Subcommittees on a more effective footing. But we recognize that some real progress has been made, particularly in addressing the perennial problem of the Legal Subcommittee's organization of work. We applaud the action taken by the Subcommittee in agreeing to specific measures that will improve its efficiency. Next year, we will evaluate the future organization of work of the Legal Subcommittee, and we are confident that the spirit of cooperation and compromise that has characterized our work over the past year will yield positive results.

In conclusion, let me turn to the principles on the use of nuclear power sources in space. As we stated at the 35th session of the United Nations Committee on Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, the United States appreciates the efforts of that Committee on the complex technical subject of principles related to the safe use of nuclear power sources in outer space, in particular the efforts to deal with U.S. concerns for technical validity. The United States did not block the consensus recommendation of the Committee to forward the principles to the General Assembly, nor will the United States oppose their adoption here. On some points, however, it remains our view that the principles related to safe use of nuclear power sources in outer space do not yet contain the clarity and technical validity appropriate to guide safe use of nuclear power sources in outer space. The United States has an approach on these points which it considers to be technically clearer and more valid and has a history of demonstrated safe and successful application of nuclear power sources. We will continue to apply that approach.

Principle 11 calls for review and revision of the principles within two years, and we strongly believe that this will be necessary. Our vote in favor of these principles is predicated on the understanding that Principle 3 will be revised. In fact, this review and revision should begin promptly at the next sessions of the Scientific and Technical and Legal Subcommittees of COPUOS. In this manner the Committee can ensure the principles related to safe use of nuclear power sources in outer space are technically sound and are consistent with proven U.S. safety practices.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
